

# LUCILLE LOVE, The Girl of Mystery

## A Soul Thrilling Story of Love, Devotion, Danger and Intrigue

By the "MASTER PEN"

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### CHAPTER XXXV.

#### A Girl With One Idea.

BEHIND her, Lucille could hear the pursuit. Not a second could she spare for thought of regret. The wounded, dying man, even though he had given up his life to assist her, was obliterated from her mind as she dug tiny heels into the flanks of her mount and urged him onward.

The moon that had seemed so friendly but a short while before, had now become a deadly enemy, lighting up the course she was taking. Only the thick, tropical vegetation helped her at all, the giant cacti, the huge palms with their long hung fronds, the shadows of the bushes and hedges casting mystic shapes here, there, and everywhere and bewildering those who followed.

Times, above the ringing of her horse's hoofs, she would hear the shouts of those behind her. Now and then a message of lead would whine its dreadful tale into her ears, but all these were growing fainter, less distinct with every leap of the animal she bestrode. Remained now but the last line of pickets she knew Loubeque had posted about the ranch. If only she could get past that line then it would be a desperate undertaking for the one who met her on neutral ground.

It had been a bitter struggle to bide her time. Often she had felt the temptation to run away from this place, even though she knew her chances for final success were nil, but always had she conquered and waited for the ripening of opportunity.

And just when everything appeared hopeless, when the long road was darkest, love had planted its seed within the heart of Loubeque's follower and urged him to the sacrifice of honor and life to her escape. Surely she could not fail after the manner of her coming this far.

Came the tolling of a bell from the ranch house. There was the unmistakable message of her escape in its brazen tongue. She looked back, frightened. Rockets of vari-colored flames were criss-crossing the blue vault of night, a myriad of man-made shooting stars retelling her flight to every one of the band.

Desperate though she knew they were, from these signs, a feeling of despair instead of confidence grew steadily in her heart. Despite the speed of her mount, the limits of Loubeque's great ranch had not yet been reached. And after the ranch—if there was to be any "after"—what then?

As though in answer to the unspoken question, simultaneously with the looming of the bayonet fence before her, two men leaped from the shadows, springing at the horse's bit. The beast swerved violently, almost unseating her and tossing the man on his left into a cactus, where he rolled, howling in painful rage, as the needles pierced him. The second man had a firm hold upon the horse's head. Lucille saw he had caught the brute by the nostrils with his free hand and was smothering him into docility. Instinctively she leaned far over and snatched the revolver he wore from his holster, jamming it viciously under his chin.

The fellow's head shot back jerkily, his eyes glaring glassily into hers, then he staggered back, clutching futilely for the weapon she had seized.

With a hard, trickling, little laugh, she clubbed the weapon and drew the sight roughly across her horse's neck, scratching him so fiercely he fairly leaped over the distance that separated her from the broad gate beside which the two sentinels had stood. As he darted madly through, the whine of a bit of lead passed so close she could feel the breath of it upon her cheek.

Something primitive within her was roused, a wild, fierce joy of combat which she had never felt before. Leaning far forward upon the brute's neck, she turned and fired squarely at the spur of flame that was leaping towards her out of the night. She saw the man leap into the flame, his arms outstretched as a broad jumper throws himself at the tape, then dug her heels once more into the dumb brute's flanks and sped on through the night.

Hours, it seemed, she rode, with never the slightest slackening of the mad pace to which she originally urged her mount. He was lathered with foam but she had no pity on him. Her brain was fiercely chaotic, wild with the bloody memories of the night, intoxicated with the madness which had made a primitive thing out of her femininity, obsessed by the delight of feeling herself able to be self-protecting among the most desperate of men.

Before, unconsciously, she had feared the potentialities of Hugo Loubeque's strength. The mental power of her beauty and innocence. Now she knew these things to be but a cloak with which she had masqueraded, a woman, unrecognizable even to herself. She feared him no more, feared his threats no more. An old saying she had heard a grizzled veteran of her father's command once utter came back to her as she looked at the heavy weapon she still clung to: "Judge Colt made all men equal." She laughed triumphantly at the knowledge gained first hand of the truth of this saying.

From now on she had every advantage. She was free and she knew where the stolen papers and documents were secreted in the mysterious house of inexplicable disappearing rooms and stairs. She had the diary of Hugo Loubeque in her possession, and she had the ruby necklace which was equivalent to vast wealth. She had the outward seeming of guilelessness, was girlish and delightfully effeminate, but she knew the power of the claws she had, and her eyes rested fondly on the revolver, even as she urged her horse to greater speed.

Across the trackless plain she rode with only the moon and stars looking down upon her, a wild, eerie figure of a bareheaded girl. Behind the pursuit had died away and before there was nothing save a slender ribbon of water that the moon buried its face in contentedly.

She heard voices, low pitched, yet carrying far in the silence of the night. Instantly she drew rein and flung herself to the ground, listening intently. Creeping cautiously to a slight rise, she looked down upon an adobe shack, before which a little squad of barefooted Mexicans looted idly, their brown hands lazily supporting old-fashioned Springfield rifles, such as she recalled the soldiers of Uncle Sam to have carried in the old days.

From where she watched she suddenly noticed a stir among the men. From the interior of the shack stepped a gaudily dressed little Mexican, evidently an officer, from the awkward salutes accorded him by the tatterdemalions gathered before the house. For some reason she could not analyze, Lucille listened eagerly.

heard their allusions to the United States cavalry they must sift through before hoping for success.

Her eyes were glittering with excitement when she stole cautiously to the adobe shack, peering inside slowly and carefully before entering. She knew all their plans and her blood was boiling but she also knew from what they had said that they too would be on the look-out for any upset to the well laid plot.

From a chest in the corner, which she hurriedly overhauled, she drew a similar suit to the one the little leader had worn. It would just about fit her and she must take no chances of trying to cross the Rio Grande attired as she was.

Swiftly she changed, for every moment now was precious to others as well as to herself. Daughter of General Sumpter Love, she was afire with rage at the way the Mexicans had spoken of the border patrol of her country, the presumption of the plan she had heard outlined. The gaudy costume fitted her beautifully and the broad straw sombrero, with its weight of silver cording and tassels made it easy for her feminine features to be unrecognizable even as it concealed her long hair.

She was well pleased with herself when, again, she mounted her horse. The beast had been ready to drop in his tracks any moment and she had killed two birds with one stone while changing her costume. Cautiously toward the glittering ribbon of river she rode, her eyes always alert for any sign of the Mexican foraging party.

The horse hesitated at the bank of the stream but Lucille boldly urged him forward. Cautiously the beast advanced one foot before the other, sinking lower and lower in the water, until, his feet giving out from under him, he launched out. Lucille held to the reins and thanked her stars for the forethought which had induced her to change the skirts which would have weighted her down.

She heard a huge sigh of relief as, dripping and disheveled she stood upon the "right side of the Rio." Up and down the bank she looked for signs of the border patrol but none was in sight. Breathlessly she remounted and rode up and down. Still no welcome challenge from a soldier. But in the distance she could make out a tiny speck.

The chances were it was one of the Mexicans. But something must be done if the ranchman was to be saved from the plot she had overheard. Fiercely she urged her mount toward the speck in the distance, until her heart sank as she recognized the man for one of the plotters. Cautiously she followed him, finding it very difficult because of the man's own fear of detection. Hours it seemed to her she pursued the slinking figure until it joined with two others. Gradually, after a few miles journeying, a great blaze shot high in air, a blaze punctuated by shots and wild cries.

The three men cruelly dashed their spurs into the sides of their horses. Came a thunder of sound as a great bunch of cattle from the remuda of the American were driven toward her by the fiendish Mexicans. Lucille saw the danger she was in of being trampled underfoot by that wild herd, driven to frenzy by the flames and popping revolvers from behind them. She urged her own horse to the right, escaping just as the remuda whizzed by her in a wild riot of sound. Here and there the Mexicans had assembled themselves, always alert, marvelous horsemen all, keeping the frightened beasts together while they drove them in a direct line for the river.

Lucille felt a shot slash through the sleeve of her jacket. She reined in her horse instantly, for she knew the Mexicans had passed. As she turned, she almost collided with a long-moustached, grizzled man, driving bullet after bullet toward the marauders. She did not speak, did not even relax in, but urged her own horse beside his, drawing her revolver.

The ranchman uttered a bewildered ejaculation as he saw she was of his own blood. "I was trying to get there in time to warn you," she gasped. "There's a chance of driving them into the patrol, if you know where it is."

Again he granted his amazement at her woman's voice. Without another word, as though complete understanding had been established, he waved to the right and drew her revolver as her freshened horse ate up the ground beneath his feet. Time and again she fired, the sound of her own gun mingling with the rapid discharge of the ranchman's to make it sound like a fusillade. Came a sudden abrupt wheeling of the stampede. Came a rifle shot, more like a cloth being ripped it was than anything else. Lucille heard the sharp voice of the sentry, saw the hesitancy of the Mexicans even as they huddled close together, facing that solitary figure in olive khaki, bestriding his mount as though carved from granite.

They looked hesitatingly behind them. The ranchman's revolver sounded and their leader threw his hands in the air and flopped over upon his horse's neck. The soldier's voice rang out to them and the frightened bandits threw down their short carbines in token of surrender. The sentry waited until Lucille and the ranchman came up then listened to their story, at the end demanding their presence before his commanding officer.

The girl listened silently to the expressions of gratitude bestowed upon her by the ranchman, then watched him as, following the captives he entered the house to which they had been brought. It took but a little while for the sentry to emerge with his captives, then she caught her breath with a cry of delight as she recognized a young officer whom she had known in the Philippines. He beckoned her silently, seating himself at his desk and writing busily for a moment before nodding briskly that she should speak. A dancing imp of mischief was in her eyes as she uttered his name.

"Lieutenant Carmody, don't you remember me?"

The young officer's eyes opened as wide as his mouth. He stared dumbly at the slender figure before him, knitting his brows in an attempt at concentration. Then Lucille removed her hat, allowing the roughly piled-up masses of hair to tumble over her shoulders while she laughed regularly as she saw that still he did not clearly recall her.

"Lucille Love!" he gasped, half rising from his seat, his hands clutching the table edge so tightly his knuckles glinted a bluish black in the light from the incandescent bulb. "Lucille Love or her ghost?"

"A very tired and hungry ghost," she laughed delightedly. "Just try me and see."

As he summoned his orderly and gave him instructions to bring instantly some canned stuff, Lucille hurriedly sketched out her adventures to him, eagerly persuading him when his face showed that he half believed she had taken leave of her senses. His expression was very grave when she finished.

"I suppose you know that Gibson was per-

mitted to resign and nobody knows where he went," he queried.

"Hugo Loubeque showed me the newspaper," she nodded. "And father—" Her tone was numbed at being brought into such close contact with one who could realize what all these things meant.

"The General is under a heavy cloud of suspicion. He has requested an inquiry into his own conduct in the affair. The messages were most important, in fact their sale could harm us greatly."

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The reflection made the dreary trip a very happy one, served to while away the time with dreams of such surpassing beauty that, at times, she had to close her eyes to shut out the radiance of them. With every clamping of the wheels upon the frogs of the track, her heart gave up a song of confidence. For Hugo Loubeque had put forward his own strength against her and added to this the strength of a portion of his organization. He had imprisoned her in two apparently impenetrable places, and still she was here, all unknown to him, speeding to-

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"I suppose you know that Gibson was per-

which she could not describe even to herself.

Suddenly the reason for her being upon the train came to her and her hands sought her breast, then her throat. With a little cry she staggered back into the arms of the women.

"Robbed!" she gasped. "I have been robbed!"

The women looked at one another pityingly, then incredulously and finally believing as they caught the pallor and sanity on the girl's face.

"Try and think, my dear," one of them pleaded. "You have been astonished—the light-socket in your section was loose and the escaping gas—"

Lucille did not answer. Summoning all her strength, she turned the knob of the door and sought the conductor. He looked incredulous at the girl's charge, but investigation showed that the door had been tampered with. Nothing, however, could be done before reaching San Francisco except a search of the car.

Lucille went with him from place to place, scanning every face. But she knew who had done this thing. When she fought against the fingers of the drug they had been the fingers of Thompson. When she had slipped from peaceful slumber into the drugged stupor it was Thompson who had been bravely fighting.

But Thompson—where had he disappeared? What had become of the man? She knew it had been him, knew it even though the face she looked into while she fought had been scarred recently, showed a white streak that gave a sinister expression to his otherwise smug countenance.

She wondered if that streak had been the bullet-made one of the Mexican who for love of her, had given up his life out there on the ranch of Loubeque. Whether or no, she was positive that Thompson was the thief.

"We know who the thief was, Miss," reported the conductor a little later. "He had the compartment facing your section. The screen is cut out. He must have dropped out the window after working his game."

Lucille smiled faintly.

A medium sized man, rather dark, plainly dressed, with features that nobody would notice especially and a livid scar across the side of his face," she murmured.

The man looked at her in surprise.

"Thompson," she murmured. "Yes, it was Thompson. I was positive from the first."

As the conductor corroborated her description of the thief, she lay back against the dusty cushions of her seat, idly watching the train chugging across the landscape. She had started badly but she clenched her teeth firmly. Her purpose was firm as ever, her rage a bit higher.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### The Keen Eyes of Loubeque.

HUGO LOUBEQUE cursed profoundly to himself as he paced up and down the floor of his San Francisco house. From below came the sounds of his servants, searching into every nook and cranny of the mysterious house for the packet of papers and documents he knew Lucille had hidden here. Already they had been through the place twice and as yet no sign had come to light of their resting place.

He frowned heavily as he went to the window and looked down upon the street, deserted now save for the old woman who trudged toward the place. She carried a basket of fruit over her arm and Loubeque smiled grimly as she disappeared from his sight, then reappeared after being turned away from the door by the servant.

They had been bothered a great deal the last two days by all sorts of women, vendors and peddlers and agents, bothered until he had ordered an explicit sign over the entrance, barring them. But now, as he idly studied the something about her caught and held his attention. She moved slowly but there was an affection about that slowness which had no kin with decrepitude.

Came a ring at the door bell as the postman stepped up the little walk. But Loubeque did not heed him. His eyes were fastened, like those of a hawk now, upon the old woman. She had stopped beside the alarm box on the corner lamp post. Suddenly the bent form straightened and he read the impish, watery eyes of Youth in every movement of the illi attired old woman. Her hand groped upon the ground. He saw her pick up a stone and smash the fire alarm. He waited, his eyes still fastened undeviatingly upon her figure.

Came the sound of fire engines, rolling down the street in a black cloud of smoke, engines, they always seemed, of destruction that could have nothing to do with saving lives or property. Loubeque watched the woman. She dashed toward the captain as he darted up in his light buggy, pointing eagerly toward the house of the spy, her eyes glowing with excitement. Then Loubeque smiled as he pressed a bell and ordered the search to stop immediately.

Before the rush of firemen with their hose the door opened. Their heavy feet slumped upon the stairs, throughout the house. But Loubeque did not move. He watched Lucille as she tossed aside the habiliments she had worn over her girlish clothes. She looked swiftly about to make certain no one was in sight. Then she swiftly approached the extra trunk upon which the slippers and hats of the firemen were laid. Once more she looked about her then flung herself into a long rubber coat and jammed a helmet over her head.

Loubeque smiled once more, a broader smile this time, as she darted up the walk and into his house. Swiftly he peered over the stairs. Without an instant's hesitation Lucille had sped to the basement. He tiptoed to the room that had been assigned her when he held her captive here. Preparing a button, one wall of the room opened. He peered into the waiting room as, below, she searched feverishly for the papers.

Loubeque quietly moved back to his own room. Slowly his fingers reached out. Came a slight clink of machinery. Then the spy stepped below and received the assurance of the fire captain that everything was well. His smile was that of a man quite positive that everything was more than well.

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### The Best Laid Plans.

LUCILLE started violently, just as her hands encountered the packet of begrimed papers and documents. A faint, humming sound mingled with the heavy tread of the firemen above stairs. But she had won, was victorious after many defeats. Still, that sound—

She seemed to have heard it before. With a little cry of horror she looked up, her hands clasping the packet to her breast. The room that had been her boudoir was slowly closing down upon her, was moving down, down, down, its dark floor threatening to crush her like a letter-press closes upon its contents. Then it stopped.

She looked toward the door through which she had entered, her delight at the escape dying before the sight of Loubeque's tall, saturnine figure in the doorway, the glowing cigar tip picking out his every feature, the hateful smile upon his face. He extended his hand, bowing gracefully, sardonically.

"The packet of papers, Miss Lucille, if you please," he murmured.

(Continued Next Week.)



Lucille's Eyes Were Glittering With Excitement.